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COMING UNSTUCK AS AN INTERVIEWER

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ABSTRACT   *As a novice researcher, interviewing seemed relatively unproblematic. What an epiphany it was when I realised just how many flaws there were in both my interviewing technique and my development of an interview schedule. This paper highlights the issues that arose in the process of using semi-structured interviews during a small research project that focused on primary teacher education students' understanding of physical education. The issues discussed focus on my interview schedule, my ability to listen and probe, and the conflict of attempting to be both empathetic and neutral when I wanted to challenge points, and in my desire to get 'good' data. This paper outlines the literature that I drew on in developing my understanding of the semi-structured interview and offers a story from the field that illuminates the challenges inherent in the actual interview process.*

KEY WORDS

Interviewing, Listening, Probing, Empathetic Neutrality, Reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

From the outset I wanted to explore how teacher education courses, *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* [HPENZC] (Ministry of Education, 1999), social and cultural positioning, and individuals' own experiences of physical education influence primary student teachers' construction of meanings around physical education. Through semi-structured interviews I was optimistic that I could understand something of the complex beliefs, values, and perspectives primary student teachers have about physical education and so undertook interviewing of three teacher education students, in their last year of a Bachelor of Teaching. These students had undertaken a 36 hour module in physical education as part of their three year course. The incentives for pursuing this line of inquiry were various but predominately stemmed from my personal and professional interests in how physical education is taught and learned in schools, and a need to fulfil a research task in my own university studies. Enrolled in a doctorate of education, my assignment was to undertake and critique research using a particular method. I had used interviews in the past and felt that they had provided an opportunity for useful dialogue. But I also knew that I needed to understand the interview process better, so I set out to refine and employ semi-structured interviews to collect data for this assignment, on a topic of personal and professional relevance.

The primary intention of qualitative research is to gather data that provides an authentic insight into research participants' sense of meaning, experiences and understanding (Crotty, 1998; Silverman, 2004). While there are multiple means of

achieving such insight, the technique of interviewing is one of the most powerful tools we use to understand our fellow human beings and can be used to gain insight into the worlds in which participants live (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In practice this means that qualitative researchers tend to seek meaning while recognising that research can never be objective, value or bias free. Rather, research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denscombe, 1998; Radnor, 2001).

As a particular technique interviewing provides a way of generating data about the social world by asking people to talk about aspects of their lives. Data gathered from interviews can not be viewed as providing 'truths' about meaning, but needs to be read as constructed realities which relate to how the individual participant situates his or her sense of meaning at that particular time and in the context of the interview situation (Macdonald, Kirk, Metzler, Nilges, Schempp & Wright, 2002). There is a need and desire to limit the preconceived assumptions regarding the outcome or likely results of the interview. The struggle is to find a balance, in this form of interview, between the more positivist testing of hypothesis, and the phenomenological expectation of the researcher as a blank slate. Through semi and unstructured interviews we attempt to "understand the complex behaviours [beliefs, values, perspectives, motivations] of members of society without imposing any a priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 653) and how all these things develop or change with time and context.

In practice the interviews I conducted highlighted the need for clarity by the researcher as to their intent, practice, and way of viewing the world before determining an interview style or method. While the interviews appeared to go well, and the data gathered provided considerable insight into student teachers' understandings of physical education, the transcripts were more revealing than anticipated. They highlighted how the very nature of the interviewing process and the desire to gather data restricted my ability to listen and truly interact with the responses of the participants. Most clearly what was revealed was the necessity to understand interviewing at a deeper level if I was to avoid the same pitfalls in future attempts.

DEVISING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

It is first worth noting that the nature of the assignment and my own understanding of research process generated some limitations for my study, and my handling of the interview process. By no means can I present an exhaustive list of the limitations; however it is worth highlighting some that are significant. The most noteworthy limitation was my own understanding of my position in the research, and the influence this had on my subjectivity and openness to new ideas. The timeframe for the development of the research agenda and collection of data were restricted due to the course requirements and the availability of the students to be interviewed. This limited the possibility of having multiple interviews with each participant, and also inhibited my opportunities to transcribe each interview before engaging in the next. While these factors may have limited my research design they

also proved to be of value, in forcing me to engage in researching and interviewing at a much deeper level. This paper is a reflection of the learning process and my budding understanding of my place in the research and my skills as an interviewer.

What I proposed to investigate and how I went about the investigation was shaped by my epistemological and ontological position and the limitations of my research. My particular views of the world and my preconceptions about the 'subject' of study were also reflected in the research design and process. Within this study I had made assumptions about primary school physical education classes, based on the limited New Zealand literature in the field of primary physical education, on broader international literature about physical education, my own experience as a physical education specialist teacher in schools, as well as personal observation and hearsay from advisors, teachers, parents and students.

Based on my combined personal and professional understandings of physical education in the New Zealand context I had assumed that to differing degrees HPENZC, past experiences as a school student, practicum experiences and the pre-service physical education paper would be the key influences in shaping student teachers' understanding of physical education. I also assumed that teachers' understanding of physical education would be strongly influenced by discourse/s from popular culture, both consciously and/or unconsciously. That is, an expectation that their opinion may be formed by dominant discourses predominant in the mass media, such as obesity, nutrition and the "cult of slenderness" (Tinning, 1985, p. 10).

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The semi-structured interview schedule developed prior to starting data collection contained an outline of themes[1] to be covered and some suggested guiding questions to be addressed throughout the interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kvale, 1996). Themes in the interview schedule reflected the theoretical interests at the root of the investigation, the structure of the research project and were derived from the research question/s. The themes in the interview schedule should have acted as a guide for the interview process and the questions that were generated, therefore allowing for a flexible, yet consistent series of interviews.

While the interview schedule provided an outline for addressing the research questions, it should not have dictated the order or depth or extent to which each theme was addressed, which would have allowed the interview to remain conversational yet directed. Guiding questions were developed as part of the interview schedule not as a series of leading questions but instead as start points to

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[1] The word theme/s has multiply meanings within qualitative research. Some literature suggests that themes are derived as part of the data analysis process (Knafl & Websterr, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The literature on interview also suggests that themes may be used in the development of an interview schedule (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kvale, 1996). For the purposes of this paper I will be using the term theme/s in relation to interview schedules.

generate introductory, follow-up, probing and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996). In Table 1, I have outlined the themes and the guiding questions I used as part of my interview schedule.

Table 1.   Interview Schedule: Themes and Guiding Questions

Themes	Guiding Questions
Influence of school PE experiences	What do you remember about PE from your time at school?
	What did you learn from school PE?
Influence of HPENZC	What do you see as the most important ideas in HPENZC?
	What challenges does HPENZC present for you as a teacher?
Influence of preservice teacher education	What will you take away from your experiences in your PE course at university?
	How do you think your training in PE at university has influenced your understanding of PE?
Other influences (popular culture)	What are some of the societal issues that you think you will address for students in your PE classes?

I perceived that adjustments made to the timing, structure and intensity of the interviews, in response to the research participants' verbal and non-verbal cues would support flexibility. Having said this, I acknowledge that it is difficult to balance the flexibility needed to allow participants to express their stories, with the desire to gain consistency in data collection. Consistency was sought in the questions asked, the level of detail and the extent of the exploration of each participant's viewpoint.

On reflection I realised that my themes were driving the process and left little room for the participants to contribute beyond what I had predetermined. My desire to gain consistency in data collection may have resulted in my treatment of the interview schedule as a series of questions that needed addressing at some stage throughout the interview, with no consideration or scope for the participants to generate discussion outside this set of themes. The constraints of my assumptions, and desire to gain 'good' data that supported these assumptions, meant that my interviews became surveys where the participants become the vehicles for obtaining data.

In hindsight this shifted the interview process from that of an open-ended semi-structured interview, towards a more structured interview. I had assumed that

HPENZC, past experiences as a school student, pre-service physical education papers, practicum experiences and the influences of popular culture were the determining factors in how teacher education students made meaning of physical education. Little or no consideration was given, within my interview schedule, to how personal experience in extra curricula sport, physical activities and other life experiences and values may have influenced the student teachers' professional attitudes, preferences, and pedagogies associated with physical education. It was only as a result of analysing the participants' responses that I was challenged to move beyond my original assumptions. Their comments about the importance of stretching and warming up, could have developed in a wider range of settings than within the limitations of the influences/categories that I had perceived to be important, while the use of the term 'physical activity' by both Anna[2] and Edith also highlights the confusion that exists between physical education and physical activity, and the influential role physical activity has in contributing to understandings of physical education.

Situations like this are part of the qualitative research process. Themes and data emerge from interview transcripts that aren't necessarily prescribed from assumptions. Indeed this is an integral and desired result. This allows the researcher to move beyond their preconceived ideas and explore alternative perspectives with the participants. However, my ability to do this was restricted by my ability to demonstrate real listening[3] and a desire to support what I thought I already knew.

LISTENING

Real listening requires the interviewer to fully attend to the participant by giving complete attention to what the respondent is saying, and clearing their minds of preconceptions and other thoughts (Neuman, 1997). In contrast to real listening researchers, parents, teachers and students may demonstrate selective or passive listening. Researchers do this by giving the appearance of being attentive, with smiles, head-nods, minimal responses, and listening only to the parts of a conversation that interest them, rejecting or ignoring everything else. Researchers may adopt selective listening techniques when they have their own agenda of themes and therefore disregard the alternative contributions that participants may bring to the interview (Heshusius, 1995).

While it may be possible to give the impression of interest it is worth reflecting on the possible rarity of achieving real listening in semi-structured interviews. In effect many interviewers have a set purpose for interviewing, usually the gathering of data for the research project. The researcher can become focussed on formulating the next question before the person has stopped talking (Tolich & Davidson, 1999), analysing what is being said, or contemplating how they can steer the interview back to where they feel it needs to be heading (Heshusius, 1995), in

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used for all interviewees (Freda, Edith and Anna)
[3] Also termed as truly listening, fully listening, active listening (Heshusius, 1995; Jordan, 2001; Mohan, McGregor, Strano, & Strano, 1992; Tasker, 1994).

order to achieve their purpose. In effect researchers can struggle to clear their head of the assumptions and data collection task at hand and consequently demonstrate the characteristics of selective listening.

In the instance of my research, the interview schedule that reflected my assumptions, perceptions and categories potentially restricted my ability/openness to demonstrate real listening, and assisted in maintaining a very narrow interview agenda. For example, below is an extract from the interview with Freda, where she is initially discussing what she recalls from her pre-service physical education paper:

> Freda - I remember doing things like we made up our own T group game that we played quite often, we… learnt about two to three folk dances and I remember doing one session where we were doing rakau sticks and poi and playing around. I would have liked to be able to learn a few games already out there and oh yes we were made to run to the end of the field.

> Kirsten - For what purpose?

> Freda - A warm up before we played some games… Why can't they [the students] have an option on how they want to warm up and stretch and whatever. But even putting on some music and letting them dance around for the *tubby little kid* that doesn't want to run they might just want to take something easy and you have to build them up slowly anyhow. *Miracles* aren't going to happen straight away [italics added].

> Kirsten – It's interesting hearing you talk about that course. Do you remember your folk dances or any of the games that you learnt?

During the course of the interview I was not even aware that Freda had talked about the "tubby little kid" and the idea of "miracles" in relation to physical education. These only became apparent in my reading of the transcript. Only at this point did I realise that Freda's comments really warranted further exploration. I neglected to take the opportunity to explore these comments in my impatience to move back to the theme of the pre-service course, in an eagerness to cover all the 'required' themes. It is evident that I was more focussed on controlling/redirecting the interview, at the expense of really listening to the 'conversation' that was taking place.

Radnor (2001) acknowledges that if a researcher totally removes control or focus then the research questions will most likely not be addressed. While the research interview is often presented as a conversation it is not completely free-flowing, but will be focused by the researcher, "on content that is oriented around the research brief" (p. 59). The focus on getting through the themes outlined in the interview schedule, and also attempting to draw out data that would support my assumptions about the discourses that contribute to understanding of physical education, resulted in me neglecting to hear what the participants had actually said. This highlights the challenge of the dynamic real-time nature of the oral-aural interviews. How does the researcher see/hear the unexpected while simultaneously

maintaining some focus? Perhaps the interview situation requires that the researcher is both present and meta-present at the same time, which requires that the researcher balance the need to be attentive, sensitive and responsive while still maintaining some focus and direction.

PROBING

The control and redirection of the interview to address the identified themes may also result in the researcher probing only for information that will clarify meaning in relation to the themes, as opposed to probing for insight into other ideas. Kvale (1996), Neuman (1997) and Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggest that probing is used when the interviewer asks questions to gain more information and clarification from the participant. In providing ample opportunity for the participants to give accounts of their thoughts, and by using probes to elicit further information and clarification, the researcher is assisted in producing better data. However, probing for a clarification of the words does not ensure clarification of the meaning. It is important to consider that meaning can be lost in the vocabulary that the participant has available to them and the language of the discourses that consciously and unconsciously shape their thinking. A phenomenographic approach to interviewing would suggest that the researcher needs to ensure that they more deeply probe "to unpack interpretations and not just presume meaning" (Little, 2003, p. 38).

In the example provided below I am interested in Freda's goals for a physical education programme and so probe (identified by italics) to gain more clarity about what Freda means:

> Kirsten - If you had to list maybe three or four things you would say were the most important things you would want students in my class to learn from Physical Education, what would they be?

> Freda - Personal health, fitness and just being sensible with your body, making the right choices sort of things.

> Kirsten - *Let's just clarify these points.* By personal health you mean…

> Freda - Healthy eating, your actual health itself, your cleanliness your hygiene your, basic hygiene

> Kirsten - *Fitness…*

> Freda - Yeah personal fitness just not so much blobbing out and being lazy. Make a choice. Am I going to go for a bike ride or am I going to play the Play Station.

> Kirsten - *And the last one you said about fitness and being sensible with your body.*

> Freda - Yeah making the right choices. If it's a nice day you don't need to stay inside and watch TV all day. If it's not raining and the sun is shining go outside, go and find something to do.

> Kirsten - So in making those three choices, what do you think is being most influential in terms of thinking or identifying those things? What shapes you the most?

While this sort of probing allowed me to gain some clarification about what was said by Freda, it did not ensure that her meaning was fully clarified. Rather in working through the transcripts, and the feedback on the transcripts that participants may have provided, I could have been making meaning without really being sure that I understood what they meant. Remedially, if I was to interview this person again, I would take the opportunity to probe and keep on probing until I was sure that I fully understood what Freda meant by terms such as hygiene, healthy eating and personal fitness, and not simply left it up to my interpretation.

Our ability to really listen is also implicated in our choice to probe and not. What the researcher selects to hear will therefore restrict what they can actually probe. While this is part of the subjective nature of the qualitative research process, it is important to note that there is a difference between choosing not to probe something, and not even hearing it, so therefore not being able to probe.

In the instance below Anna was outlining how she would address aspects of delivering the curriculum; however my inability to listen limited my ability to probe:

> Kirsten - So what will you do more of do you think?

> Anna - Probably seasonal almost depending on weather and stuff like that so I think during the winter you are going to be looking at winter sports but you also need to be looking at indoor things you can do to bring in the stuff of looking at valuing and respecting and decision making and the impact on society and things. In the summer it is probably easier to spend more time outside, ideally of course, you can say it will be balanced throughout the year and you have got halls and things like that to use but that's not a reality.

> Kirsten - So how much do you think curriculum influences your thinking about physical education?

This example illustrates how I neglected to probe in order to draw out Anna's understanding of the curriculum. Anna's response suggests that "looking at valuing and respecting and decision making and the impact on society" is something that would be brought into the classroom in the winter. As the interviewer I moved on to questioning her about how much the curriculum might influence her, when it would have been more illuminating to probe her about her understanding of delivering values education, decision making and relationships with others through a movement context and not reserving it for a classroom lesson. This may reflect my interview skills, and/or the narrowness of my interview schedule. Alternatively it may be that as researchers we probe only in relation to what we actually pick up and value, and don't probe into areas that seem irrelevant or out of line with the interview schedule. Again this reflects the tension of addressing the unexpected while simultaneously maintaining focus and the opportunity that qualitative and less

structured interviews offer to open up new avenues of inquiry for the discerning researcher.

EMPATHETIC NEUTRALITY

In interviews the researcher can be selective about what they choose to probe, but they may also selectively choose to be non-responsive about what they do hear. In an attempt to keep the interview at a conversational level the researcher may choose not to comment or probe responses with which they strongly disagree. Qualitative interviewers are encouraged to adopt an 'empathetic neutrality' (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998) during the interview process. This involves demonstrating an empathy that communicates interest and care, in the individual, while striving to be non-judgemental (neutral) about what they say and do during the interview.

At the beginning of all the interviews I attempted to establish this conversational, empathetic relationship with the interviewee through some personal disclosure on my behalf, and some discussion around topics that are perceived to be socially safe and non-intrusive. I believed that this gave both the interviewee and me the opportunity to build a rapport with one another, potentially leading to a better interview. It also allowed me to begin to establish a level of intimacy and earn the trust of the participants so that they were willing to share information more freely (Morse, 1994).

Within the interviews undertaken in this research, empathetic neutrality was reinforced when I used minimal encouragers such as 'uh-huh', 'yeah', 'what do you think about…' and 'mmm', as a way of encouraging them to continue the discussion and to feel that they have given a useful response (Neuman, 1997). These assisted in keeping the conversation going and also reminded the speaker they were being listened to, even if I was only selectively listening. Bishop and Glynn (1999, p. 108) suggest that researchers do this in an attempt "to encourage free association of ideas in order to reveal the 'truth' that the research was designed to uncover in the first place" (p. 108).

Conversely the appearance of interest and agreement, through empathetic neutrality, creates a facade that disguises the researcher's feelings or evaluation of the responses.

While Patton (1990) urges to strive for neutrality, he also concedes that it is not always possible. The difficulty of remaining neutral is evidenced by the following extract from Freda's interview:

> Kirsten- So what sort of things would you do for fitness? Like what sort of activities? What would you get…
>
> Freda - I'd do, for me having the knowledge of a lot of games, I know like the tee ball and soccer and netball, hockey so I could easily teach a lot of that. Swimming, I know a lot about swimming and big ball skills, playing four square and even target or skipping, big rope skipping, even double dutch and that for the extended ones or even single rope for an individual.
>
> Kirsten - A *good* range! [Italics highlight where emphasis was placed]

As the interviewer I attempted to be empathetic in relation to Freda's views, and in doing so removed any neutrality. My desire to support Freda's answer resulted in me giving the impression that I think that the list of activities described by Freda and even the idea of fitness is not problematic, when in actual fact I view fitness and physical education as separate and distinct from each other. Even that I asked the question about what sort of things she would do for fitness, as a response to her suggesting that fitness was important, goes against my natural instinct to ask an open question such as "Why do you really think fitness is important?" Or the more leading/rhetorically biased question, such as "Don't you think so many children actually get turned off physical activity because of what they do in fitness at school?" that is clamouring in my head, to be expressed.

The intent of the research, and the need to explore Freda's understanding of physical education resulted in me suggesting to her that what she had offered in her discussion was 'good'. The facade of agreement acts to suggest to Freda that she is on the right track in her response. It does not open the interview up for the identification of meaning, or the points of difference that exist between the researcher and the participant. In my desire to encourage her expression I lapsed into value judgements on what she said. This leads the participant to believe there are correct/approved answers, rather than encouraging the exploration of her ideas. When this happened the interview became solely about collecting the data to support the purpose and research questions, as opposed to being open enough to challenge understanding and meaning.

DISCUSSION

Semi-structured interviews in which the researcher does not demonstrate real listening, and therefore gives the impression of agreement through empathetic neutrality, probes only for clarification, and continually redirects or controls the interview in order to address predetermined themes and assumptions could be viewed as oral questionnaires or "survey interviews" (Neuman, 1997, p. 254). The constraints of preconceived assumptions, categories and perceptions, mean that interviews have the potential to become surveys where the participants become the vehicles for obtaining data. This sets up a process for the gathering of data where the researcher depersonalises the research process and creates a hierarchical relationship between 'the researcher' and 'the researched'. Oakley (1981) views this as a positivist approach, in which the researcher exercises dominance and control over the interview, while never expressing their own thoughts and sense of meaning.

In contrast it is worth exploring open-ended interview processes that allow the respondents to be viewed as participants in the research and not as simple vessels from which the researcher extracts data. Radnor (2001) suggests that in interviewing, participants should be viewed as equal partners, as the interpretive researcher's task is to make sense of their world, to understand it, to see what meaning those people subscribe to. The dilemma lies in trying to achieve this while also allowing the interviewer to challenge the views/ideas of the research

participant and also allow the research participant to challenge the interviewer's assumptions.

A conversation that takes place between two interested parties, for example a discussion between colleagues that trust and mutually respect each other, allows scope for the challenge and justification of ideas, assumptions and beliefs. Through the dialogue that takes place within the conversation both parties should get an opportunity to explore meaning. This would mean that both participants act as 'researchers', exploring each others' perceptions and ideas. The level of intimacy needed to achieve this requires "reciprocity" from the joint 'researchers' (Oakley, 1981, p. 49). Personal disclosure, and a willingness to answer questions, will assist in developing a more reflexive practice that allows for personal views, interests and experiences to be explicitly presented as part of the research process, as opposed to obscuring these to preserve the 'purity' of the research.

Such a research relationship may also require that all participants develop a "participatory mode of consciousness" (Heshusius, 1995, p. 122) in which both are passively alert, vigilant but not intrusive. This form of approach is characterised

> … by both 'the totality of the act of interest' and the 'participation of the total person' (p. 225)… It involves the temporary eclipse of all egocentric thoughts and strivings, of preoccupation (p. 181)... One does not want or need anything from the other. One does not want to achieve anything. (Heshusius, 1995, p. 122)

Participatory consciousness may occur more naturally if this is a conversational dialogue as opposed to being viewed as a research interview. If this could be established within a research environment, especially within interviews, the researcher and the participant are more like to be able to understand what someone else means, or at least start to explore it. This may assist in producing a "collaborative approach to the research that engages both the interviewer and the respondent in a joint enterprise" (Oakley, 1981, p. 44) which disrupts the pattern of hierarchical relationships evident in some interview situations. As evidenced in the examples given here, assumptions of knowledge and desire to gain information without being truly open to listening and collaboration, reduced the capacity to achieve authentic insight. Conscious awareness of the need to be more open would have assisted in my own research development.

This being said collaborative interviews can also be problematic, particularly from a logistical perspective. While interviews as joint enterprises and 'true' conversations may allow both participants' ideas to be equally valid, the process is open for debate. If applied the interview should become a conversation in which all involved are expected to investigate, justify, and expand upon their and others' understandings. This may require more flexible and less prescriptive interview schedules. Alternatively, there maybe no interview schedule used that might act as a barrier to open conversation and that the researcher feels comfortable enough to challenge comments they oppose.

In addition to developing more respectful and reciprocal relationships within the research process, I need to consider how I actually approach interviews and what interviewing is as a method of data collection. Within the literature on

interviewing there are ideas worth considering that may assist in the process of developing conversations that allow all participants in the research to speak openly about their assumptions, values and beliefs. Lather (1991) suggests that having a sequence of semi-structured interviews, compared to the one off interviews undertaken in this pilot study, has the potential to allow for a deeper exploration of the research issues by allowing the participant and the interviewer to reflect in the interim period and return to topics raised earlier. Reflective periods after each interview, including reviewing the audio recording and working through transcripts together with the participants, would also assist me to identify issues in my interview schedule, listening skills and interview techniques.

However, more importantly, I have recognised the importance of integrating reflexivity into all aspects of my research process. I understood that my research was guided by my world view, and so acknowledge that I was starting to engage in reflexive practice. And yet I had not really considered how much the process of interviewing, and my ability to listen, and probe could be limited by my assumptions, or how the desire to remain empathetic and neutral would restrict me from being 'real' and result in the creation of an illusion of agreement with the participants.

What is at fault is not the process of interviewing, but more my approach to it. By adopting a more reflexive approach into my research practices I am encouraged to reflect upon how my epistemological position has and will continually shape my ability to interview (Willig, 2001). Assuming a more reflexive approach allows me to recognise how my own perceptions, beliefs and values acted on and informed all aspects of this research, and how these made it impossible to perceive myself as an impartial observer (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999) who truly listened to the participants.

However, "reflexivity permeates every aspect of the research process, challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture and politics of those we study," (Hertz, 1997, p. viii) ourselves and our audience. Within this paper I have only explored the process of reflexivity in relation to interviewing. While this is limiting, it also acts as a reminder that I need to "identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research [I undertake]: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis" (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998, p. 6).

CONCLUSION

The process of undertaking this piece of research has highlighted how much I need to learn about using semi-structured interviews for data collection. That is not to say that the data gathered in the pilot study is not of interest to me, and the teacher education community. However, it has raised a series of issues that will need to be addressed in future research in order for me to feel that the process and approach works for all participants.

The literature provided me with 'advice' and direction about the process of interviewing, such as developing an interview schedule, probing, and attempting to be empathetic and neutral. While this literature provided me with a sense of what

"interviewing" entailed and how I might approach it, my experience in this research project has made me question some of the limitations of this guidance and my desire to see it as a natural and simple option. A critique of my own practices as an interviewer has led me to expand on what I took from the literature and explore ideas about:

- the way in which assumptions can shape the developing of an interview schedule;

- the way in which an interview schedule and our assumptions can limit our capacity to really listen, and therefore our ability and willingness to probe, as well as determine;

- what we probe;

- how interviews can be conversations where both the researcher and the participants' responses can be contested;

- developing research relationships that allow the interviewer to remain empathetic without the need to remain entirely neutral.

The process of critiquing interviewing as a method has highlighted for me, the importance of the reflexive process as part of my research agenda, and the need to explore my own sense of what it is to interview. This process has proved vital in assisting me develop as an interviewer and hopefully raises questions for others about the practice, intent and process of using interviews as a source of data gathering.

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